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November 2002

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LETTERS

I was much impressed by Anne Carlson's article about incarcerated youth in the July/August 2002 issue. I believe the religious community can do much more in this area, especially in prevention.

During the 2001 County Fair, I helped give out materials to fairgoers called "Building a Better Me" for youth and "Building Blocks of Parenting" (both materials sponsored by the local Lutheran Brotherhood branch). When the fair was over, I gave the remaining materials to local social workers.

Hilvie Gross—Beatrice, Neb.

former president, Central Nebraska LB Branch #8150

Dear Hilvie,

Thanks for your letter. We heard from several other readers who also were inspired by Carlson's article to become active in prevention. Be on the lookout for future articles in LWT concerning mentoring and intentional development of leaders.

If you would like to learn about prison ministry for youth and others, contact the ELCA's Division for Church in Society at 800-638-3522, ext. 5041, for a printed resource on the subject (a project of Women of the ELCA, Division for Church in Society, and Division for Congregational Ministries) as well as other tools in the works. —the eds.

Kudos to Bishop Larson for an easy-to-comprehend Bible study for August! Our women really have

appreciated the first two studies this summer, also written by women bishops.

This is the second parish I have served where the women have found many of the studies far too academic. This summer's studies have been especially good, however!

*Pastor Jan Campbell—Jackson Center, Ohio
Grace Church*

Dear Pastor Campbell,

We have heard from many readers who expressed their delight in this summer's Bible studies. The summer studies (written by three of the ELCA's female bishops) all looked at different aspects of listening and responding to God's call for each of us. Those who attended the Triennial Gathering in Philadelphia this past July heard each bishop present her section of the study in person. It was an exciting way to bring the magazine to life.

This issue brings you the third session of the John study (written by Mary Hinkle). We hope your groups are getting into this well-written and interesting study. (If needed, back issues can be ordered from Augsburg Fortress; see page 43 for contact information.) The summer study for 2003, written by Dr. Jeanne Porter, promises to be equally dynamic. Jeanne has written for LWT before (May 2002) and has another article coming in the January/February 2003 issue that you won't want to miss. —the eds.



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GIVE US THIS DAY

A Paucity of Saints?

by Marj Leegard

SAINTS ARE PAINTED WITH EYES LOOKING TOWARD HEAVEN, HANDS CAREFULLY FOLDED MID-CHEST, AND WITH SERENE EXPRESSIONS OF PIETY. I LOOK AROUND, AND I DON'T SEE MANY SAINTS.

The news of the world is bereft of saints most evenings. Only the neighbors I do not know might be saintly. The rest have lumps and bumps strangely like my own. I look in the mirror, and I seldom look serene.

I am worried about those church steps. It is not enough to worry about my own cautious and somewhat laborious trip up and down, and my inability to kneel, but I am concerned for those who no longer have a companion for stability and support. Then I see old friends helping older friends, and young people reaching out just in time for the perilous step down.

Later, we sit with Maude and the wine and bread from the feast, but first we must commune in a different way. She wants to know about the new floor covering in the basement, who is getting married, what the sermon was about, and countless other goings-on in the communion away from her recliner. We bring bulletins and all the news we can remember.

Some friends no longer recognize us, are not curious about life outside their room or beyond their wheelchair. They know the prayers, snatches of hymns; they smile when they are hugged. They are not used-to-be saints but part of the communion right now. All the Alices and Rubys and Eddies bond with us.

We are saints together in this moment but also in that vast time that holds all the saints. Who do you name when you say, "I believe in the communion of saints"? Can you see the faces clearly? It is not that we have forgotten those faces. We remember them in a rush of composite images.

We had a scarlet tanager at one of our bird feeders, his lovely red body accented by tiny, perfectly formed black wings. He ate cracked corn and wild seeds, drank, and then ate again. Surely he will stay where there is such bountiful love! For five days he was our tanager, and then the morning came when he was gone. The drabness of the day matched our hearts. We were poorer than we had ever been before he came.

Communion of saints passing from now to yesterday leaves the same sense of bereavement. The brief flash of color and beauty was a blessing. Because it was such an uncommon gift, we wanted to keep it. We long for its presence again. And we are given that gift.

Communion of saints is the address of our home. I belong there now, by grace. All around are the others in that gathering. Not only the today gathering, but also the gathering that was and the gathering that will be.

We are given grace to say, "I believe in the communion of saints," and joy and thankfulness abound.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL RECEIVER

by Linda R. Harper



IN A LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH, PAUL WRITES, "GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER" (2 CORINTHIANS 9:7, NIV), A REMINDER TO ALL OF US THAT A CORE VALUE OF GIVING IS WANTING TO GIVE. When Paul tells us, "If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever" (1 Corinthians 13:3, Jerusalem Bible), he is emphasizing the importance of the heart's willingness to give. While we all know the joy of giving from the heart, many of us have also experienced feelings of exhaustion, depletion, and resentment when asked to squeeze one more act of giving into an already overburdened schedule. Yet God asks us to give "not reluctantly or under compulsion"

(2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV). How, then, can we maintain a cheerful and loving heart when we give?

The key to cheerful giving lies in our willingness to receive. This includes recognizing our own limitations and needs as givers, and being willing to freely give to ourselves and graciously accept from others. Many of us find it hard to take gifts for ourselves, and when we do, we often feel guilty for it, especially when there are so many other needs and demands. But Paul reminds us of the importance of balancing our needs with the needs of others: "This does not mean that to

give relief to others you ought to make things difficult for yourselves: it is a question of balancing what happens to be your surplus now against their present need, and one day they may have something to spare that will supply your own need. That is how we strike a balance" (2 Corinthians 8:13–14, Jerusalem Bible).

Being open to receiving gifts is a responsibility we have to God, self, and others. To be the cheerful givers that God asks us to be, we must stay replenished so that the gifts of giving can truly flow to and from a willing heart.

TWELVE WAYS TO PRACTICE BEING A CHEERFUL RECEIVER

1. DO JUST ONE THING AT A TIME.

When multiple commitments await you, stop, and choose to fully immerse yourself in each activity, one at a time. If one task has to wait until a little later, let it wait. S-T-R-E-T-C-H that self-imposed deadline. Do you really have to get it done in such a hurry, or can you complete the task at a slower and more enjoyable pace? Many of us go through our days at an accelerated speed. Slow down when you get dressed, eat, drive, or walk from place to place so you can appreciate the task rather than resent it.

2. BUILD GIFTS FOR YOURSELF INTO THE ORDINARY.

Think of all the routine things you do for yourself every day. Consider how you can change a draining experience into a nurturing one. For example, rather than grabbing fast food or putting a pre-made meal in the microwave, stop and ask yourself, "What kind of eating experience can I create that will satisfy my body while feeding my soul?" Take the time for a delicious and nutritious meal in a soul-nourishing atmosphere.

3. ASK A FAVOR WITH NO THOUGHT OF RETURNING IT.

Many of us are reluctant to ask a favor if we do not feel

we have one coming or are not sure that we can reciprocate in a timely manner. Go ahead and ask anyway. Let someone else have the pleasure of giving to you with no expectation of a reward.

4. RECEIVE A GIFT YOU WILL NOT RECIPROCATATE EVENLY.

When you receive a gift from someone to whom you have not given such a present, accept it graciously, say thanks, and then fully enjoy it without guilt or thought of matching the gift. Practice being a gracious receiver.

5. DISCOVER GIFTS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES.

Instead of trying to control a situation, allow yourself time to enjoy the pleasure of unexpected moments. For example, when you find yourself stuck in traffic, use the time to listen to a favorite radio program, tape, or CD. Arrive at your destination refreshed, not frazzled.

6. RECEIVE THE GIFTS THAT FLOW FROM YOUR ACTS OF GIVING.

When you give a gift, let go of your need to please others, keep things equal, or change someone. Delight in the

act of giving itself, and take in the full pleasure and joy the experience offers, regardless of the outcome.

7. GIVE YOURSELF "UNEARNED" GIFTS.

Don't wait for someone to notice that you need something—and then resent it when they don't. Take the responsibility for self-giving into your own hands. Decide that you do not need to justify each self-nurturing act. Instead of operating from judgment about what you may "deserve," affirm the fact that it is okay to nurture yourself.

8. LISTEN TO YOUR UNIQUE WAYS FOR SELF-NURTURE.

Consider the little things that can make your day more comfortable. Most of us already know what they are, but we do not stop and take the time to add them to our day. These personal comforts might include warm slippers, taking the scenic route to work, soothing music, comfortable clothes, flannel sheets, pajamas warmed up in the dryer just before bed on a cold night, a long bath, a glass of ice water with a slice of lemon, a favorite snack, or a scented candle. You'll be amazed at the way even one little thing can be replenishing!

9. GIVE TO YOURSELF WHILE GIVING TO OTHERS.

This is a good way to cheer yourself up while cheering someone else! For example, if you want to spend time with your dog and your friend is in need of a listening ear, suggest talking while walking your dog. Or if you have committed yourself to addressing and stuffing envelopes—and it's a beautiful day—perhaps you could move your work outside.

10. RECEIVE THE GIFTS OF WAITING.

Giving to others often requires waiting—in doctor's offices, hospital waiting rooms, or school parking lots. Taking care of yourself while taking care of others will go a long way toward cheerful giving. Consider carrying a tote bag with items that nurture you, such as lotions and lip balm,

sketchpads and markers, a book of special photos or inspirational quotes, a good book or favorite magazine, a bottle of water, and favorite snacks.

11. BE OPEN TO RECEIVING GIFTS THAT OTHERS GIVE YOU IN THEIR OWN UNIQUE WAYS.

Focusing on what you are not getting can block your ability to see and receive the everyday gifts that are being offered to you. Let go of your expectations for particular gifts from your spouse or family members. For example, if you are disappointed because you did not receive the anticipated flowers, buy them yourself and then open your eyes to the gifts that are being offered to you.

12. RECEIVE GOD'S GIFTS.

Open yourself to receiving unexpected gifts from God. God's gifts can come in surprising ways—even in what you might perceive as unanswered prayers. When life does not happen as we had hoped or planned, our disappointment can get in the way of seeing the gifts that are present in the unexpected course of events. Let go of the need to see your particular vision realized so you can receive the greater gifts God has in store for you.

The key to cheerful giving is to receive freely and openly with joy. God asks us to listen to our own needs and desires so that we can receive the gifts of replenishment unique to each of us. With generous wisdom, God has designed the natural flow of gifts to and from the heart to depend on our willingness to receive the gifts that are available to us from God, ourselves, and others.

Linda R. Harper, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and workshop leader who has practiced in the Chicago area for 18 years. She is also the author of *Give to Your Heart's Content... Without Giving Yourself Away*.

But Joy Comes in the Morning

My eyes desperately searched the screen, looking for the pulse of my baby's heartbeat. Only six weeks earlier, I had watched as the sonogram showed the baby inside my womb rolling, kicking, and stretching. Now, that same figure was still. A lump formed in my throat as I choked out the words, "My baby's not moving. My baby is dead, isn't it?" I watched the doctor's eyes as he concentrated on the screen while sweeping the silver ball over my swollen abdomen.

We all knew the answer before I even asked the question. Brian gripped my hand as thoughts and emotions swept over me. The reality of the motionless figure on the screen sank in. My baby, my precious baby, was dead. **by Dawn Waltman**



Malia, Dawn, Matthew, Brian, Micah and Megan (holding a rag doll in memory of Molly).

THROWN INTO A WHIRLWIND OF CONFUSION and grief, I wanted to run away and leave the nightmare far behind. I was given the choice to have labor induced or to wait days, even weeks, until my body naturally went into labor. I desperately wanted to see the treasure that had become so much a part of me, so I decided to have labor induced the next day.

The next day unfolded with a blur of tests and needles, and nine hours of intense labor. When our lifeless baby girl was laid in my arms, I was in awe of her perfect little body. We named her after me, Molly Dawn, and shared her with close family and friends throughout the evening. After the last friend left, it felt so good to have her back in my arms again, and yet I knew our time with her was coming to an end.

My husband and I wrapped her snugly in a blanket, trying to remember every detail of her little face. Then I kissed her forehead and laid her on the bed. She looked so tiny and vulnerable lying by herself on that big bed. I kept my eyes on the little bundle as long as I could while the nurse pushed my wheelchair out of the room. After just a few seconds, though, we were out the door, and my little girl was gone.

When I left Molly in that room, I left part of my heart with her. All through her memorial service and then in the days and weeks that followed, we clung desperately to the hope of heaven and the promise of seeing little Molly again. Brian and I learned in a whole new way what it meant to be carried in the hands of Jesus and blessed by the support and prayers of people who cared. We wanted to trust God with our shattered dreams, but oh, how it hurt.

I remember words echoing Psalm 30:5 being prayed over our family: Tears may last for a nighttime, but joy comes in the morning. This verse assured us that grief would pass, lasting only for a time. With the heaviness of Molly's death lying on my heart, I honestly didn't see how the tears and grief would ever

come to an end. I found myself at a crossroads. God's grace provided a way for me to begin healing, but in order to begin, I needed to acknowledge and accept the many gifts that God was bringing out of our tragedy.

The promise of heaven was now real to me as never before. I was comforted to know that Molly was there with Jesus, and someday, we would all spend eternity together. My heart flooded with emotion as family and friends wrapped us in a love that I felt in the very core of my being. Instead of shutting each other out, my husband and I worked hard at sharing our heartache and were blessed with a deep companionship that we might not have experienced otherwise. The blessings were countless, but the decision to receive them as gifts or cast them aside in the midst of my grief was mine.

Slowly, I discovered that my course began changing. Over time, my journey of grief showed signs of detours that led to hope and healing. I opened my heart and became receptive to receiving the new hope, the new joy, and the new peace God wanted to pour out upon me. As I loved and was loved by others, my heart grew even more, and the once-raw wounds of a shattered dream seemed a bit less painful. The ache that came from loving, losing, and missing Molly never went away. I began to realize, however, that if I allowed it, a glorious new hope would take root and be found in this loss.

The seasons continued to change, and one Sunday morning there was a notice in our church mailbox. It announced an information meeting for parents who might be considering adoption. We had always wanted to adopt, and several weeks later, we found ourselves listening to the presentation about adopting little girls from China. Halfway through the meeting, all heads turned toward the door to see a man, woman and child approaching the group. The man held his little Chinese daughter in his arms, and she

kicked and squealed as she saw the crowd. Brian and I simultaneously squeezed each other's hands. At that moment, we knew we were being called to adoption. With the death of Molly constantly in our hearts, we recalled the psalm that had been prayed over our family: Tears may last for a nighttime, but joy comes in the morning. Somehow we knew that our little girl from China would be the joy that comes in the morning.

Our family loved our little joy from the time we started the adoption process. For 21 months, we filled out paperwork, completed a home study, took a fingerprint check, and so on. Our two precious children, Matthew and Megan, prayed tirelessly.

In the midst of the process, to our delight, I became pregnant. I struggled almost daily with the fear of losing the precious baby in my womb. It took a conscious, deliberate decision to commit the life of our baby into the hands of Jesus. When our infant son entered the world alive, well, and hungry, we rejoiced! What an incredible blessing to deliver, hold, and take home a healthy baby after the stillbirth of Molly.

One month after our son Micah's birth, the agency called and gave us the news that a little girl from China would soon be joining our family! We felt the

confirmation of God's hand on the entire process, since we had received the agency's call on the anniversary of the day we had said goodbye to Molly two years before. God's hand had reached out to us, offering gifts that would bless our lives even in the midst of sorrow, and we had chosen to look for and accept every gift God so freely gave. Now with the safe delivery of our son and a new daughter waiting to join our family, I felt drenched in God's abundant love. The next day, when the overnight delivery driver brought the package containing her picture and personal information, the children and I nearly knocked him over. We ripped open the package and stared at the dear little face in the tiny photo.

Two months later in a rundown office building in Changsha, China, Malia Joy Waltman was laid in her daddy's arms for the first time. A wide smile spread across her face the moment she heard his voice. The waiting and wondering were over. Our Joy had finally come.

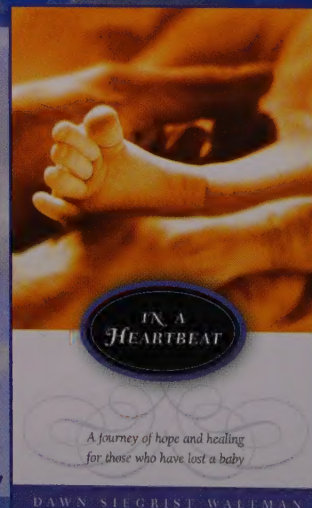
This article is adapted from the author's book *In a Heartbeat: A Journey of Hope and Healing for Those Who Grieve the Loss of Their Baby*.

*In a Heartbeat -
... a life is stilled,
... a dream dies,
and heaven becomes amazingly real.*

"A journey of hope and healing for those who grieve the loss of their baby to miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death."

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN COMMUNION”?

I HAVE BEEN BLESSED TO BE IN COMMUNION WITH A WONDERFUL, WACKY GROUP OF COLLEGE CLASSMATES KNOWN WITHIN THE VALPARAISO DEACONESS WORLD AS THE NOTORIOUS CLASS OF '71. WE LIVED TOGETHER DURING OUR COLLEGE YEARS IN DEACONESS HALL, A DORMITORY WHERE STUDENTS WERE EXPECTED TO LEARN THROUGH LIVING TOGETHER WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN COMMUNION WITH ONE ANOTHER AND WITH THE BROADER DEACONESS COMMUNITY. FOR MY CLASSMATES AND ME, THE PROCESS WAS DIFFICULT. WE DIDN'T KNOW EACH OTHER TO START WITH, AND WE DIDN'T NECESSARILY LIKE EACH OTHER MUCH EITHER. by Gwen Saylor

AFTER GRADUATION, we all moved to different parts of the country and saw each other only at annual deaconess conferences. As the years passed, we began to sense that something wonderful happened when we came together. Though we remained strong-willed, independent women, gradually we realized that we were interconnected in a deep, powerful way, and that we needed the community of one another to become the woman each one of us was called to be as the image of God. Gradually, we grew into full communion with one another, into an interrelationship where each one is loved and affirmed in her uniqueness, where we can

engage one another in honest critique, and where—when we're together—wonderful things happen that simply wouldn't happen if we remained apart.

Our communion with one another is a great gift. It can become a limitation, however, if it keeps us from seeing the broader picture of the web of relationships into which God continues to weave us. This happened recently when we gathered to celebrate the wedding of one of our classmates. After the worship had concluded, a member of the groom's family mentioned that it was time for pictures. Assuming that the request was directed to us,

we—the Class of '71 including the bride—immediately lined up for a class picture. Clearly, a picture of the Deaconess Class of '71 was not what the groom's family had in mind. Their somewhat chagrined reaction reminded us of our need to stretch beyond ourselves to see the greater picture. Our communion with each other interconnects us in webs of relationships with people we don't know well or have not even met yet, and so we need to acknowledge their place in the picture, too.

We in the ELCA are one communion within the larger communion of God's people throughout time and space.

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN LUTHERAN FOR A LONG TIME MAY REMEMBER HOW DIFFICULT IT WAS TO PERSUADE THE VARIOUS GERMAN, NORWEGIAN, SWEDISH, DANISH, FINNISH, SLOVAK, AND OTHER IMMIGRANT GROUPS TO BECOME ONE LUTHERAN COMMUNION.

Over time, our forebears came to know and trust one another enough to realize that the different immigrant groups were interconnected in a deep, powerful way, and that God's mission in the world would be furthered by their united witness. Over the years since the 1988 merger, we have grown into the communion that is the ELCA. Our communion with one another within the church we love is a wonderful gift.

Unlike the Class of '71, the ELCA has not given in to the temptation to allow our communion with one another to become a limitation. As we make our way into the 21st century, we have made commitments to stretch beyond where we are, to see more clearly the larger web of relationships into which God continues to weave us. After much study, prayer, and deliberation, we as a church body have entered into full communion agreements with the Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church, and the Episcopal Church USA.

Our decision to enter these agreements is

grounded in our belief that God created us in God's image for relationship within a communion that reflects the diversity and the unity of God's people through time and space. Whenever we confess that God reveals who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we affirm the mystery that God who is one is also relational and communal. Whenever we confess that we are created in God's image, we affirm the mystery that we are born to be in relationship, in communion with God and one another. In confessing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain distinct within the Trinity, we affirm the distinctness of particular communions within the larger communion of God's people. In confessing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, we affirm that each particular communion is interconnected in webs of relationship within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The full communion agreements are a witness to our common faith in the Triune God.

Our full communion partners were not chosen at random. We all share the heritage of the Reformation movements that swept through Europe in the sixteenth century. After years of dialogue, study, and prayer, we and our partners have discerned that the differences that distinguish us from one another are complementary rather than contradictory. We all proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are in fundamental agreement on the basic doctrines of the

Christian faith. THE UNIQUE HERITAGE THAT EACH PARTNER BRINGS TO THE TABLE ENRICHES RATHER THAN LIMITS THE MISSION TO WHICH WE ALL ARE CALLED. TOGETHER, WE BEAR WITNESS IN AN INCREASINGLY FRAGMENTED SOCIETY TO THE UNITY IN DIVERSITY AND DIVERSITY IN UNITY THAT THE TRIUNE GOD INTENDS FOR CREATION.

For some of us, the communion agreements may seem more like a challenge than a cause for celebration. We may feel thrown together with people we do not know and may fear that our doctrinal heritage has been

or will be compromised. What we are experiencing is the growing pains of learning to be in communion with those whose heritage is similar to and yet different from ours.

TO BE IN COMMUNION—WHETHER WITH AN INDIVIDUAL, A CLASS, A DENOMINATION—DOES NOT MEAN TO BE WISHY-WASHY ABOUT WHO ONE IS AND WHAT ONE STANDS FOR. FULL COMMUNION IS POSSIBLE ONLY WHEN DIFFERENCE IS RESPECTED, WHEN EACH PARTNER'S UNIQUENESS IS AFFIRMED AS PART OF THE RELATIONSHIP.

Because of the full communion agreements, we have new opportunities to move beyond stereotypes we may have of our partners and to learn through honest, open dialogue and critique where our various heritages diverge and converge. Participating in these discussions will equip us to see even more clearly who we are as Lutherans, what we have to offer to the broader conversation, and how we can grow in receiving cheerfully from our brothers and sisters.

On a local level, the communion agreements open doors to all sorts of joint activities, undertaken together for the sake of the mission to which all God's people are called. For example, partner churches are holding joint Bible schools, offering joint adult education opportunities, and joining together in social ministry projects. We are learning that when we serve together, wonderful things happen that simply wouldn't if we remained apart.

We also have gained opportunities to witness to the unity of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church through joint worship and sharing of Holy Communion. Where local circumstances have warranted, some congregations have chosen to enter formal relationships with each other for the sake of mission, or to call a pastor from a partner tradition. For example, in some rural and urban areas, small Lutheran and Presbyterian or Episcopal congregations have jointly called one pastor to serve both congregations. This "yoking" allows both congregations to remain viable and to

expand their mission far beyond what either congregation could do alone. The pastor of the yoked congregations is expected to learn and to respect the unique heritage of each congregation while remaining active in his or her own tradition. For example, a Lutheran pastor also serving a Presbyterian congregation will follow the Presbyterian liturgy in that congregation and the Lutheran liturgy in the Lutheran congregation. No Lutheran congregation will be expected to interview a candidate for pastor from another tradition unless it has indicated an openness to considering the possibility and the church bodies involved have given their consent.

Perhaps you have heard also about conversations with the Roman Catholic Church and are wondering what kind of communion we have or don't have with that tradition. Official Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues have been going on for a number of years. After much study, reflection, and prayer, the two churches have discerned that there is sufficient consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification by faith to warrant the lifting of the condemnations each church imposed on the other at the time of the Reformation. Although we are far from being in full communion with one another, the lifting of the condemnations is a major step in healing relationships that have been fractured for centuries.

WE ARE GIFTED TO BE IN COMMUNION WITH THE WONDERFUL (AND SOMETIMES PERHAPS WACKY) GROUP OF LUTHERANS THAT WE CALL THE ELCA AND TO BE FULL COMMUNION PARTNERS WITH CHURCHES THAT SHARE THE REFORMATION HERITAGE.

Together we witness to the Triune God in our world. What a gift to receive! What a gift to share!

Gwen Sayler is associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, and a member of the Valparaiso deaconess community.



MOTHERING SEASONS

Question Marks and Commas

by Jennifer Grant Haworth

NOT TOO LONG AGO, MY FIVE-YEAR-OLD, EVER THE CURIOUS SORT, ASKED ME THAT QUESTION MOST DREADED BY PARENTS. "MOMMY," HE SAID INNOCENTLY, "WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?"

"Heaven," I said, without missing a beat.

"How do you know, Mommy?" Marcus responded, somewhat skeptically.

"Because I know you, and I know God, and I know you knew God before I knew you and that God knew both of us before we knew each other."

"Oh," said Marcus, apparently satisfied with my answer. "Can I go and play with Alana now, Mom?"

"Sure," I said, with a smile on my face. "But if you want to talk more about this later, we can, okay?"

"Nah," he replied. "I like that I came from heaven instead of a hospital!"

Unlike my son, I cannot say that I accept and receive life's varied lessons so easily—let alone as cheerfully—in my daily walk with God. But in recent years, I have become increasingly aware of the gifts that accompany cheerful receiving, especially when walking by faith alone has defined my experience.

Infertility: A Gift Revealed

Like most couples, my husband and I assumed that when we decided to have a child, we would be able to do so without incident or delay. Delay, however, became the reality as weeks stretched into months,

and months stretched into years. Aware that something wasn't quite right, my husband and I visited our respective doctors and quickly strapped ourselves in for a four-year infertility roller-coaster ride—one that whipped us through emotional spirals and spun our faith in unforeseen ways.

At first, our spirits were high: How difficult could this be? If pills, blood draws, hormone injections, and ultrasounds were all that was required of us, the payoff would be well worth the effort. But after a few years of feeling like a radioactive pincushion, my spirits began to wane. On Christmas morning 1996, I walked into church, saw what seemed like 1,000 happy, smiling children's faces, and promptly lost it. Overcome with sorrow and despondent over whether I would ever share the joy of Jesus' birthday with a blessed baby of my own, I failed to make it past the second Christmas carol that morning.

Three months later, I was back in church for Good Friday services. By this time, Steve and I had tried nearly everything we could to have a baby, and our hope was rapidly fading. In the stillness of that service, however, I felt God's loving presence. As I made my way down the center aisle for the veneration of the cross that afternoon, I grasped that my experience with infertility had tested my faith in ways unknown to me previously. I knelt before the

Never place a period where God has placed a comma.

cross, placed my hand on the wooden emblem of our salvation, and whispered reverently, "Jesus, I surrender this to you. May your will be done."

Not much more than a year later, our son, Marcus, was born. Some seven years after our married life began, our infertility experience had come to an end, but not before God had gently nudged us to wait, listen, and trust.

I now look upon this experience as a gift that challenged me, lovingly, to place my trust and faith in God above all other things. To be sure, infertility drained me emotionally of almost everything I had. But it did not conquer my faith. On the contrary, it tested my faith in a way that led me to understand fully Gracie Allen's quip that the faithful "never place a period where God has placed a comma."

Depression: A Grace Disguised

In the years after the birth of our son, Steve and I rejoiced in the new discoveries that unfolded as Marcus grew from infant to toddler to preschooler. These delights, however, slowly became blurred by intermittent periods of darkness and, finally, a nagging depression that deflated my spirit and exhausted my energies.

Since childhood, I have carried an independent, self-reliant spirit that, I believe, has shaped and defined my personhood. I found it exceptionally difficult to accept that I had to stop and listen to what my depressed spirit kept calling me to hear. Although I offered excuse after excuse to explain why I didn't want to play with my son, engage my work, or socialize with others, the agitation, irritability, fitful sleep, and crying tantrums that had come to define my existence ultimately drove me to my knees in search of authentic answers and healing.

What did those prayers on bended knee reveal? Sitting alone one afternoon at home, preparing a lesson for a class I lacked the motivation to teach, my mind wandered off to a song by Amy Grant I had recently heard: "The River's Gonna Keep On Rolling." As the lyrics of this inspiring song echoed through my mind, I began to feel the message sink into my heart. If you have heard this song before you'll know that the lyrics encourage the listener to remember that God is always with us through every twist and turn of life. And even if we don't find the particular peace of mind that we might be searching for, God's love finds us wherever we are and washes over each of us, completely.

That afternoon, God provided healing reassurance that despite whatever darkness might color my days, God's love for me will "keep on rollin' on." And while I suspect that depression will be a cross I will carry more than once throughout my life, I now view and accept it as a grace no longer disguised, a "comma" that causes me to slow down to listen for the faithful presence of God's voice and to receive God's words and love. Perhaps, like my son, I too am learning to accept God's answers, to live in the light, to cheerfully receive, and to go out and play with my friends.

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CREATING A HARVEST OF REMEMBRANCE





If spring is the season when most of us anticipate the new, fall seems well suited then for remembering and bringing out the old. For quite a few weeks already, most of us have been going about the task of re-establishing familiar routines, from school schedules to church activities. A first brush with cooler temperatures may have sent us scampering for last season's stash of heavier clothing. Even though we may not always appreciate the return of cold weather, many of us may still enjoy putting on a favorite sweater or pair of gloves again, and in so doing we may be flooded with memories of events that have taken place in our lives during previous autumns.

Fall is a time of gathering and collecting, especially for northern gardeners and farmers. We gather in the harvest and take stock of our labors over the past several months. Some people keep daily journals to record the results of the planting and harvesting, as well as to allow comparisons to notes made in previous years.

Fall holidays also have a way of returning us to things that have surrounded us before. We may have fall decorations that we reuse from one year to the next. We may take dry leaves and press them between the pages of a book. The scents of apple cider and pumpkin pies immerse us in the culinary traditions of the season.

HERITAGE OF FAITH

While fall may be a time when we are naturally in tune with memories about many daily life events, it is also a time of remembrance for the church. The church calendar is ripe with opportunities for remembrance and celebration.

For many Lutheran congregations, the last Sunday in October (October 27 this year) is celebrated as Reformation Sunday. It is a time for us to consider the many people who have handed on the faith throughout the centuries of the Christian church and within our own denominational tradition. The following Sunday (November 3 this year) is customarily celebrated as All Saints Sunday, a day when all people of faith are remembered, living or dead. Veterans' Day on November 11 (in many countries it is called Remembrance Day) recalls for us the service and sacrifice to their country paid by many men and women. Thanksgiving Day (November 28 this year in the United States) brings to

mind the blessings of the past year while also prompting us to recall the things we cherish about our national life and history.

Those responsible for planning worship and seasonal decorations in congregations will want to acknowledge the calendar (both church and secular) and the rhythms of the natural order in a variety of ways.

PLACE OF REMEMBRANCE

One way to celebrate these days would be to create a wall of remembrance in an area where people gather before or after worship. This could be in a narthex or even in part of the worship space itself (though preferably not too close to the primary liturgical centers of pulpit and altar). The wall of remembrance might be set up in the last week or two of October and remain in place throughout the month of November.

One way to make a wall of remembrance would be to place a large table up against a wall and dress it with a tablecloth of a dark solid color (forest green might be good, since it echoes the color of the liturgical season while also serving as a nice backdrop for various fall items). Then place on the table a few items gathered from nature at this time of year (such as gourds, fall fruits, winter squash, and leaves of various colors). Allow your own local environment to dictate what you select. Place a number of small votive candles on the table and light them just before people gather for worship and other events.

On the wall behind the table, or on large display panels or shelves standing on the table itself, place photographs that relate to the congregation's history. Then invite members of the congregation to bring in photos of people whom they wish to include in the congregation's remembrances. (Be sure to make clear that all photos may be collected by their owners at the conclusion of the display period. With color photocopyers, scanners, and digital cameras becoming com-

monplace these days, no one need part with an original photograph in order to contribute an item for the wall of remembrance.)

An alternative to using a table and the wall for creating a wall of remembrance would be to use a ladder—often called a “Jacob’s ladder.” An old wooden stepladder (though perhaps not one with a lot of paint spills on it) may be decorated with fall items as described above, with several open spaces for placing framed photographs. Perhaps a wall adjacent to the ladder might be used for mounting a poster board on which unframed photographs might also be placed.

You also may wish to place a book of remembrance in the center of the remembrance table or ladder, with the invitation for people to write down the names of those whom they wish to remember. These names may include anyone who has died, but should especially include those local saints who are remembered by the congregation, and anyone in the congregation who has died in the preceding year. The book itself may be a handsomely bound blank book from a stationery store (such a book could also be used from one year to the next), or a nicely covered three-ring binder with several blank sheets of good paper (standard blue-lined filler paper is not up to the task).

If you start one this year or next, no doubt a wall of remembrance will become one of those annual traditions that provide people in your congregation with a way to connect this time of year with the transitions of their own lives. Finally, while we ourselves are remembering others who have lived and died, ultimately it is God who remembers and receives us all. Autumn is a wonderful and colorful time to praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Dennis Bushkofsky, an ELCA pastor, lives in the Chicago area.



IDEANET

How Do You Increase Fellowship and Participation among New Members?

Our circle is fortunate because our church has a sponsor program for new members. Sponsors help orient new members to the groups and activities that are available to them, and these sponsors, in turn, tell us who might be interested in our circle or quilting group. We then personally invite the new members and arrange to meet them on their first visit so that they will feel more welcome. We even drive them if necessary. All of this helps to increase fellowship.

Mildred Johnson—Chandler, Ariz.

Holy Trinity Lutheran

On circle Bible study nights, we go to a different member's home for our meetings each time. But first we meet at a nearby restaurant for dinner and fellowship. We all have grown closer to each other.

Harriet Bolick—Conover, N.C.

Zion Lutheran Church

Our church has a "Meet to Eat" ongoing program. You sign up five days in advance, and the hostess plans the menu and seating arrangement. There is also childcare available in the church nursery.

Mary Keith—Newberg, Ore.

Joyful Servant Lutheran Church

Every year at our December meeting, we have a tea and invite all the new members from the past year. We send individual invitations and follow up with phone calls. Each newcomer is paired with a current member of our group who will be her hostess, greeting her when she arrives and sitting at her table.

Barbara Fountain—Henderson, N.C.

Grace Lutheran

Our circle realized the need for a regularly published church newsletter and now publishes one every three months. The most popular feature in each issue is "Behind the Scenes," in which a member of the congregation is the surprise subject of the article. We highlight that person's life, involvement in the church, community participation, and accomplishments. This segment is well received. We also use the newsletter to promote fellowship activities and give updates on the church's finances, childcare schedules, and vacation Bible school. There is also a singles section, plus information on other organizations that are involved with our church.

Marguerite Roeper—Rome, Penn.

St. John Lutheran Church

HOW are YOU?

A Thankoffering Devotion ● by Susan Gamelin

Leader: God's grace has gathered us here today, the God whom Jesus called "Abba," and to whom Jesus breathed his prayers; the God who breathed fresh air into Jesus' tomb on Easter's dawn; the God who breathes on us each day with the refreshing and invigorating wind of the Holy Spirit.

People: We are grateful. Amen.

Leader: We are God's grateful people. We rejoice as cheerful receivers. Please stand as we call out now the words of Psalm 100, using the words of "The Message," a contemporary rendering by Eugene Peterson.

Reader 1: On your feet now—applaud GOD!

Reader 2: Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence.

People: Know this: God is God, and God, GOD. He made us; we didn't make him. We're his people, his well-tended sheep.

Reader 1: Enter with the password: "Thank you."

Reader 2: Make yourselves at home, talking praise.

Reader 1: Thank him.

Reader 2: Worship him.

People: For God is sheer beauty, all generous in love, loyal always and ever. Amen!

Song: "Praise to You, O God of Mercy" (*With One Voice*, 790)

Leader: Our ancestors in the faith have modeled what life in Christ is all about. One such story is told about Old Dr. Leonard Kendall, president of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, a half-century ago. You wonder about the "Old" in his title? It is used

to distinguish him from his son, John, Young Dr. Kendall, also a president of Gustavus Adolphus as the twentieth century was drawing to a close.

It's said that when Old Dr. Kendall was asked, "How are you, sir?" he would invariably reply, "Grateful! How are you?" The polite but stunned questioner would then hear a summary of the things for which Old Dr. Kendall was grateful that day.

For what are you grateful this day? Practicing Old Dr. Kendall's ritual might help us name those things. I'll begin by asking the person on my left, "How are you?" When she answers, "grateful," I'll ask for what she's grateful today. After sharing, she'll turn to the person on her left and ask, "How are you?" We'll continue on until all have shared those things, small and large, for which they are grateful today.

Reader 1: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Song: "Thankful Hearts and Voices Raise" (*With One Voice*, 623)

Leader: Someone who knew Old Dr. Kendall well recalls that when the day was a difficult one, sometimes the good doctor had to grind out the word "grateful" from between clenched teeth. But grind it out, he did. And then he would name some of those hard, hard things from which he was learning gratitude. We're not saying that God creates difficulties to make us grateful but that God can use even the difficulties crafted by the forces of evil. When we realize that God is with us to help us get through the hard times, gratitude can grow our hearts two sizes larger—like the heart of the Grinch.

Let's go around the room again, practicing Old Dr. Kendall's discipline, this time expressing gratitude for what God is doing in the midst of the troubling things of our lives. I'll start by asking the person to my right, "How are you?" She can answer—with clenched teeth if she'd like!—"I'm grateful." And then I'll ask, "What difficult thing has God used to grow gratitude in your heart?" Then she'll turn to the person on her right and ask, "How are you?" We'll continue until all have shared, to whatever extent they wish and are able.

Reader 2: Luke 7:36–50

Song: "Create in Me a Clean Heart" (*With One Voice*, 732)

Reception of Thankoffering

After the Thankoffering is received, pray together:

Leader: Good and gracious God, accept this offering as a token of the outpouring of our gratitude to you.

People: Thank you, thank you, thank you, living and breathing God.

Leader: For the things that delight us and the things that weigh us down—all of which have grown gratitude in us,

People: Thank you, thank you, thank you, loving and compassionate God.

Leader: For the gift of this community in which we can share our gratitude to you with each other,

People: Thank you, thank you, thank you, refreshing and invigorating God.

Leader: Grow gratitude within us, good and gracious God, that we might share it with others, in your name.

People: Amen.

Leader: Our gratitude can't be stopped here, can't be limited to this place and time. We can't keep here either the gratitude that flows out of us for the awesome things God has done in our lives or the gratitude that has surprised us by arising from the depths of despair.

We can, and we must, speak of our gratitude to a world that is forgetting how to say "thank you" to each other as well as to God.

Perhaps this is the way we Lutherans can best be witnesses of God's grace to the world around us, to say "grateful," when someone asks, routinely and unthinkingly, how we are. Their surprise at our response would give us an opportunity to talk about how good God is to us and to invite conversation about God's goodness in their lives.

Let us commit to use the discipline of Old Dr. Kendall once a day until we meet again. Let's agree to talk about our witnessing when we meet, about the ways we are growing in our gratitude and in our ability to share it with and learn from others.

May God bless this covenant, our witness, and the lives of those we touch.

People: Amen.

Song: "Oh, Sing to the Lord" (*With One Voice*, 795)

Susan Gamelin is a pastor for leadership in the South-eastern Synod of the ELCA. She lives in Atlanta with her husband, Tim.

CHRISTMAS MORNING OF THE SPIRIT

by Margaret G. Payne

When I was a child, the excitement of Christmas morning was almost more than I could bear. After what seemed like endless waiting, the moment finally arrived when I could sit down in front of the heavily tinsel tree, one sleepy parent on each side, with a pile of gifts in front of me. I would savor the slow unwrapping, pause for a moment before popping the lid, and then take plenty of time to explore and discuss that gift before moving on to the next one.

EVEN THEN I KNEW that the gifts of Christmas morning were more than just new toys and clothing; they were wonderful surprises from people who loved me and wanted the best for me. It was the most exciting morning of the year, and I never would have left a gift remain, unopened, under the tree.

Yet as I grew from a little girl into a woman, many voices encouraged me to leave unopened gifts all over my life. Junior high school taught me that it would be bad for my social life to unwrap my intelligence. In college, it was common wisdom that women should put more effort into getting married than finding a career. As a wife and mother, my own guilt insisted that I put everyone else's needs first and let my own gifts, unopened, collect dust in the corner.



I was fortunate that my parents, a few wise teachers, and later my husband and children kept pushing me—even when I resisted—to get busy and open all the gifts in my life. I tried the excuse that Christians should be humble, and that it was sinful to think so much about my own gifts. But my family helped me to see that a humility that does not use gifts from God is a false humility. When we leave gifts lying around

unopened, we are saying that we know more than God does about the way our lives should unfold. That attitude is sinful. True humility begins when we let go of a limited view of ourselves and open our eyes to all the possibilities that God has in mind for us.

Humility means leaving all the doors open and letting God nudge us in the direction we should go, no matter how unlikely or frightening it may seem. Two

years ago, I thought that I had unwrapped all my gifts. I was a wife, mother, pastor, and writer embarking on a new and undemanding semi-retired life on a farm in New England. When I made a quick stop at the synod assembly a few months after my arrival, I attended the opening worship, which was led by four bishops. All of them were tall, white, middle-aged men with beards and purple shirts, and I thought to myself: Boy, I could never be a member of that club.

But God sees beyond what is to what can be, and tugs at us to embody the vision. Thirty-six hours after my shortsighted statement, I was a member of that club. It was a shock and a surprise. Since that day, I have had moments of terror as well as moments of grace, and I have been humbled by the ways God has used gifts already known as well as new gifts to accomplish the work of the church. It is clear that it is only in the gathering of all people's gifts that we can move toward the wholeness and power that God wills for the body of Christ in the world.

Each woman is called to rummage around in her life and find the gifts that God has given, even if they are buried under debris or shrunk from neglect. We will not always find support and encouragement from those who are closest to us. There are times when we have to step outside the expectations of family and friends in order to be obedient to God's will.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the best models for the willing and radical obedience that God asks of everyone. When she said "Let it be with me according to your word," she set out on a path of deep humility. Her worries about pleasing her parents, submitting to her husband-to-be, and the whisperings of

her religious community were all set aside by the irresistible impulse to obey God.

While true humility enables us to grow, false humility interferes with spiritual growth. It is possible to become so absorbed in humble serving that we let it become a soundproof wall between us and God. When Jesus chided Martha for her anxious and grumpy serving, he was trying to free her from bondage to false humility. It is only when we take time to listen to Jesus that we can learn how to grow into faithful disciples.

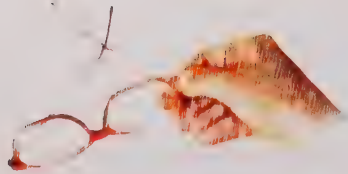
In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the master showed no sympathy for the servant whose fear caused him to hide his one talent. That servant was kicked out of the kingdom. Jesus wanted us to realize that we will be held accountable for our gifts. If we hide behind the excuses of humility, busyness, limits, or fear, God cannot welcome us into the kingdom of abundance.

False humility leaves us feeling weary and depleted. The humility that God asks of us brings confidence, wholeness, and peace. There is an inde-

scribable freedom and joy that characterizes the new spiritual season that begins when we let God awaken, equip, and guide us. When we face a task that we know we cannot do alone, then it becomes clear that God is doing it through us. It is both humbling and exciting to see what God can do when we live fully into our gifts. Life is filled with wonderful surprises. It is a Christmas morning of the spirit that never ends.

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Margaret G. Payne is bishop of the New England Synod of the ELCA.



READER CALL

Have You Ever Had to “Take It on Faith”?

I’m sorry,” the voice said. “I hate to give bad news over the phone, but I feel you must know immediately that the lump we removed from under your arm has cancer cells in it. I must tell you that you have breast cancer.” With just one alarming and formidable phone call, my world turned upside down.

I have always viewed life as a journey. My journey, up until this point, had been pretty normal. I’d had my share of peaks and valleys, even a few mountains to climb. Now I stood at the foot of a sheer mountain face that rose before me, a solid stone wall. I could hardly see the top, yet I knew for my life to continue, I would need to climb it even though I didn’t have the faintest idea how to even begin.

It was then when I realized I would just need to take it on faith, even though I was still hurt, confused, and angry: I had plans, children to raise, a job as a school principal, and had just started graduate school. I did not have the time to battle cancer.

So I fought with God. “Why me?” “Why are you being so unfair?” I questioned. I whined. I bargained. I pleaded. Despite my questions, I began to climb the face of the mountain, one step at a time, one handhold at a time, one inch at a time. I learned about despair, and I learned about darkness: My hair fell out in handfuls, I was sick and my body hurt, and finally, I had a mastectomy.

Rock climbers will tell us that you can’t climb the face of a mountain without a rope. I learned that one must also have hope. Hope came to me like a rope over the top of the cliff, and I found I had something to hang onto. At first, hope was a mailbox stuffed with cards from friends. Then a second rope came over the edge, meals for the hard days. More ropes: calls from friends, flowers, gifts, new friends, different opportunities, and always, prayers. More hope. I was still angry and had questions, but God didn’t give up on me. God led me in a new direction; I just needed to trust.

As I sat with my colleagues in August at our administrative retreat, preparing for the new school year, their despair over lack of funds floated around me, and I listened as though in a fog. What did they know of despair? I knew of despair—but hadn’t I also learned about hope? Then I understood where God was leading me. I returned to the retreat the next day and spoke about hope. I asked them to see hope through my eyes and to have hope as we moved forward into the new year. As I spoke, I was able to step out of my despair, to become a survivor, and to see my journey as one of hope. As I finished that day, I felt a surge of joy and energy. Best of all, I felt God’s love and found the courage to keep going. I kept climbing.

At long last, I have reached the top and am continuing my life's journey. I have come to realize that cancer has given me a "new normal" built on a greater appreciation of family, friends, and the hope they bring. It has been a frightening and dangerous climb, but now as I turn and look back, I realize the view is incredible.

Mary Jo Schmid—Moor, Minn.

I'm trying to grow older gracefully. But in recent years, one ailment after another keeps invading my territory. Now it's a bad shoulder.

"Nothing life-threatening," the doctors keep saying, for which I'm thankful. But what will I do when I'm told that it is serious?

I know it's coming, and I have to admit, if I think too hard about it, I get scared. My mind wanders off to different scenarios. That's when I pray that I'll have strength to accept whatever happens. I have to take it "on faith."

Tiffany Traynham Klappenbach—Mount Gilead, N.C.

When I was divorced after 19 years of marriage, my teenage daughter wasn't able to hear the sincerity in my voice when I said, "Honey, of course I want you to live with me."

Devastated by the loss of a spouse, social status, many friends, a home, and even effective support from the pastor of my beloved congregation, I could not find any answer for facing what I felt was the loss of my only daughter as well when she went to live with her father. All I could do was turn the whole matter over to God as best I could, pray "your will be done," and make every effort to "take in on faith."

That action was one of the hardest things I've ever done. What a risk! Would I lose to a step-mother who avoided me with great care? Even though it was excruciatingly difficult for me, God

answered me by directing me to stay in the same city, near my daughter. The healing began when she edged back into my life. It was slow at first, but she eventually inquired timidly, "Mom, can I come back home to you?"

Now our extended family keeps in close touch. We all recently shared the joy of my daughter's marriage. "Taking it on faith" turned out to be my gift from God.

Ramona Carlin—McPherson, Kan.

I had been married for 11 years and was mother to three wonderful daughters, ages 9, 7, and 5. Soon they would all be in school, and I would likely return to the work force. The time period was the '50s and '60s, and all my friends and I were stay-at-home moms. I spent many happy hours sewing dresses for the girls and myself. Our home was pretty and comfortable.

When I learned that we were again expecting a baby, I had to admit to very mixed emotions. As much as I loved being a mom and taking care of our home, I was secretly looking forward to joining the work force again.

I was trying so hard to be happy and cheerful, but I had big-time morning sickness. It got to the point where the girls had to learn to get themselves ready for school. One morning, when I was almost three months along in my pregnancy, I noticed a rash on my face. It itched too, and I was just a little feverish. Here I was, nauseated and breaking out with who knows what.

German measles were circulating in the primary grades at school. My obstetrician said it was probably hives but insisted I see him and use the side door. He took one look at me and sent me to the dermatologist down the hall. This second doctor confirmed it . . . German measles, rubella . . . whatever. It had a

hideous sound to my ears. At the time, there was no vaccine for this disease, and everyone knew what a horrendous outcome there could be. My doctor held my hand and softly told me that “probably” everything would go well. Since I was completing my third month of pregnancy, my chances for a healthy pregnancy increased.

I sobbed all the way home. My husband and I cried together. Then I said, “Okay, Lord, please help us through the next six months. I know you will be with me no matter what, and you will help take care of my unborn child. I love this baby so very much, and I just want to be a good mother and take care of it.” I prayed this prayer every single day, at least once.

On September 11, 1964, we were blessed with a perfect, healthy, beautiful son. Our faith in God carried us through many dreaded thoughts. I thank God every day for so many blessings.

Roberta A. Santangelo—St. Louis, Mo.

I was a German citizen and survived the Second World War. It was June 1945 when railroad boxcars loaded with wounded German soldiers stopped near Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia, and waited to cross the border into the American zone of Germany. Karlsbad was occupied by Russian and American troops. The Americans and some civilians in the area provided some food for the wounded soldiers and their nurses and doctors. Suddenly this stopped and we were told “because this train originated in a town that now is occupied by the Russian army, it belongs to them and will be taken care of by them.” Needless to say, we did not receive any food.

Any wounded soldiers who were able to walk left the train with most of the nurses and doctors and walked 12 miles to cross into the American zone of Germany. The wounded who were not able to walk were left to the mercy of the Russian army.

Knowing that God had brought me through the war so far, I knew that God would be with me in this situation also, and I decided to stay on the train. Together with a few nurses, two doctors, and my colleague, we looked after the wounded. We begged for food at houses when the train stopped. I did not know where we would end up. Maybe Siberia?

The train was going east and stopped inside Poland at a camp for wounded prisoners of war. After a few months, I was released.

Edith Schultz—Danbury, Wisc.

It was the year 1943. World War II was raging in Europe and the Pacific theaters. I had just graduated from the Swedish Hospital School of Nursing with a three-year diploma. I had been accepted to serve as a missionary in Cameroon and/or the Central African Republic. This was known as a “faith mission,” and our support was based on the verse in Philippians 4:19: “and my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Being wartime, all shipping had been taken over by the U.S. government for transport of the military. But when we got to New York, we discovered that Portugal (a neutral company) had a small passenger line with an office in Manhattan. Of course there were many other people who also wanted to go east. Prayer prevailed, and we were able to purchase first class tickets on a passenger boat, which was hardly “first class.”

When we arrived in Portugal, we found ourselves in a “bottleneck.” After some finagling, we finally got on a boat. The schedule of that boat did not include a stop in where we were headed, so we had to make a roundabout trip, by way of Leopoldville, the capital of what was then Belgian Congo. Three weeks later, we arrived safely to our destination in the extreme eastern part of Cameroon.

Beryl Sand—Lake Mills, Iowa

Dishwashing Became a JOY!

by Audrey Carli

It would take hard scrubbing to clean the burned food from the frying pan, but that was part of my chores for the day. No use complaining, I admonished myself; just get the job done. Then the phone rang, temporarily releasing me from the task.

"HELLO!" I ANSWERED, hoping it was a friend who wanted to chat a while and keep me away from the hot suds a bit longer. The laundry and vacuuming earlier that day had me ready for a rest, even if the dishes would not fade from sight.

My grandmother's gentle voice greeted me. "Would you give my friends and me a ride to visit Lydia at the nursing home in Crystal Falls?"

"Sure!" Another chance to escape the dishes. "I'll pick you up in a few minutes. Tell your friends I'll pick them up, too."

When we entered the two-story brick nursing home, I felt a chill like an invisible splash of ice water. It was my first visit there, and I had expected to see peppy older folks sitting and chatting as they enjoyed their golden years. Instead, I saw older men and women sitting silently in wheelchairs. One white-haired man was parked near a window that overlooked the busy street flowing with traffic. Others looked at a television screen in the corner of the room but there was no conversation, no visible companionship among the residents.

Gram, her two friends, and I entered Lydia's room. Her pale eyes flickered with recognition as a smile brightened her face. Pointing at me, she said, "When you gonna bring the baby to visit me?"

I stood in silence. I had no baby to bring to visit. My children were in school.

Gram whispered, "She thinks you're someone else. She was embarrassed the last time she did that. Smile and talk. If she asks again, then explain, okay?"

I chatted, asking about her day and if she liked to read. She replied haltingly. Lydia mentioned her classes and how she liked teaching third graders.

Then it hit me—vital people who had raised families, cooked, cleaned, had teaching, nursing, engineering, medical and other careers sometimes ended up in nursing homes. I looked forward to savoring each day as an opportunity to serve others; these nursing home residents had already served much.

As we all rode back to our town 10 miles away, I wanted to hurry home and wash the dishes with zeal. I yearned to hug my family and go for a hike with them. I wanted to squeeze joy from each day with fresh gratitude!

After hugging Gram farewell at her apartment, I drove home and welcomed the sight of the greasy dishes and what they symbolized: my family sharing life and meals together! The hot, sudsy water cleaned the dishes and cleansed me from dishwashing resentment. I prayed thanks for the day, for the nursing home residents, for Gram and her friends who warmed their lives.

Psalm 118:24 echoed in my memory: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Dishwashing had become a joy!

Audrey Carli has been an inspirational writer for over 30 years. She is also a speaker for women's groups about grief and family topics.

Celebrate the Joys of Living

by Judy Buch

I grabbed my nightshirt from the pile of clean clothes and flopped it on the bed. It was 9:30, and I planned to slide between the sheets and relax. Then I saw a something on the covers and snatched up my glasses.

"Ken! Ken!" I screamed to my husband, "Come here, I found my ring!"

We both stood there examining the ring to make sure it was really the ring I had lost. How did it get there? The mystery has never been solved.

This ring was far more valuable than the diamonds on it.

The year before had been a difficult one for me: I had completed my treatment for breast cancer. Ken had been by my side every step of the way. And when I insisted on combining holistic regimens with traditional methods, Ken supported me even though our insurance wouldn't cover the expenses and the bills stacked up.

During that time, I continued to run my speaking business, sometimes scheduling radiation at 6:30 A.M. so I could catch a plane, give a speech, and return in time for the next treatment. I was also determined to complete my own speaking certification. It represented six years worth of work and a lot of family support.

The extended family had gathered at our house for Christmas that year. As Christmases go, this one was extraordinary, with relatives from all over. At the end of the gift-opening on Christmas Eve, Ken handed me a very large box. My first thought was, "I hope

this isn't one of those roaster ovens." Then I opened the card and read:

Like so many other years, we faced many hurdles, clearing each one and becoming stronger in the process. This year you exceeded your certification requirements, built 'Hands of Peace' into a great (puppet) ministry (at our church) and solidified your business, all the while being a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother. You cleared the largest hurdle so far and are healthier than ever. Your achievements make me proud to be your husband. This gift is a celebration of our life together.

I love you,

Ken

Well, I just started blubbering. The words Ken had written meant more to me than anything in that box.

I tore off the paper and inside was another box, and another, and another, until all that was left was a small leather case. Inside was a band of diamonds. I was overwhelmed.

One night, 10 months later, I put my wedding rings and celebration ring on the bedside stand and went to sleep. Early the next morning, Ken emptied the wastebasket next to the bedside stand and set it outside for the trash collectors. I slept later than usual that morning, and when I reached for my rings, I didn't find my celebration ring. I looked everywhere, tore the sheets

off the bed, emptied pillowcases, searched the floor, looked through the bedside stand, and ran down to tell Ken. He came up and together we searched again. No ring. We decided it must have fallen into the wastebasket and was hauled away with the trash. I was very sad, but Ken reminded me that we still had each other and all the important things the ring symbolized.

The ring had been missing for six months when I found it lying on my husband's side of the bed that night last April. We celebrated together the joy of finding what had been lost.

At first, I thought, "I know this means a lot to me, but it certainly doesn't mean anything to anyone else, so why bother?" But then I remembered that Jesus told the story about a woman who lost a piece of silver (Luke 15:8-10). She swept her whole house looking for it, and when she found it, she celebrated with her friends and neighbors. Celebration affects our attitude about life and faith. It shines a light on how we choose to live.

I didn't throw a big party to celebrate finding my ring. But many of us make excuses for not celebrating, including myself. We think celebrating the small things is self-centered and silly. Yet, we are told to rejoice.

We take time to feel miserable, but then when something good happens, we're too busy to celebrate, or we wait for the other shoe to drop. Yet when we look back on our lives, do we remember only the struggles and crises, or do we remember that in spite of our trials, we celebrated often and with enthusiasm? Remembering to celebrate the smaller events can help us really experience the joy of life. Whether it is for yourself or for someone close to you, find ways to acknowledge a job well done, a delightful surprise, and milestones along the way.

Judy Buch is a certified speaking professional, author, and principal. She lives in a small town in New England with her husband, Ken, and their dog, Willie.

SMALL CELEBRATION IDEAS

Here are a few ideas for celebrating with friends and family members.

Have lunch together at a cozy inn.

Fill your fireplace with glowing candles, play your favorite music, and enjoy a beverage of your choice.

Plan a day in the city visiting museums together.

Bake cookies with your children or grandchildren, and tell them about your success.

Create a romantic dinner with wine, candles, and soft music, and celebrate with your mate.

Visit an antique bookstore and read some of the inscriptions and notes in the margins. Imagine the people who wrote them.

Give yourself a party and ask everyone who comes to share a story about a blessing they have received.

Enjoy a day in the mountains or on the beach.

Pack a picnic and go for a walk in the park or a drive in the country.

Visit an herb farm.

Purchase flowers for the altar, and then take them to an elderly woman and stay to visit for a while. Talk about the blessings in her life.

Buy bright-colored placemats and napkins; prepare a light lunch for friends.

Session 3

Seeing and Believing



by Mary Hinkle

Study Text

John 9:1–41

Theme Verse

“He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’” (John 9:25)

Overview

Jesus’ encounter with a man who had been blind from birth gives him two opportunities to make God known. First, Jesus reveals God’s glory by providing a kind of healing that is greater than anything reported “since the world began” (John 9:32). Second, Jesus teaches about sin, rejecting the notion that sin is the reason for illness. He connects sin not to the physical blindness of the man he heals but rather to the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees who cannot see God at work in Jesus’ ministry or believe in Jesus as one sent from God. In this session, we will study the story of the man born blind and consider how God continues the work of healing, redeeming from sin, and creating faith.

Opening

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.
 (“Healer of Our Every Ill,” refrain, *With One Voice*, 738)

Who Sinned?

Read John 9:1–2. The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus and his disciples encountering a man who was blind from birth. When they see the man, the disciples ask Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

1. What are the assumptions behind the disciples’ question? Do people have similar assumptions today about the relationship between sin and suffering?

Read 9:3–7. In these verses, Jesus rejects the disciples’ suggestion that the man’s blindness

was caused by either his parents' sin or his own. Jesus does not settle the issue of the cause of the man's blindness. Instead, he speaks of the result of the condition: The man's blindness will result in an opportunity for Jesus to "work the works" of the one who sent him (John 9:4).

However, this does not mean that Jesus has nothing to say about the concept of sin or its effects. In fact, the theme of sin comes up three different ways in this story: First, when the disciples tie sin to suffering; a second time, when the Pharisees are investigating whether Jesus healed on the Sabbath and is therefore a sinner (John 9:16, 24); and a third time, when Jesus says that the Pharisees' own unwillingness to see him for who he is highlights their own sin (John 9:40). We will look more closely at each of these understandings of sin as we read through the story.

Interrogation

After the man is healed, several conversations take place. The rest of this story is a series of dialogues interspersed with background provided by a narrator. Sometimes the dialogues seem more like interrogation than conversation, especially as the Pharisees try to determine whether a law has been broken. The scenes look like this:

9:8–12 The neighbors question one another and the man who had been blind.

9:13–17 The Pharisees question the man.

9:18–23 The Pharisees question the man's parents.

9:24–34 The Pharisees question the man again.

9:35–38 Jesus finds the man and questions him.

9:39–41 Jesus speaks to the Pharisees, who ask, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

JESUS AS HEALER

Jesus heals people in all the gospels. Sometimes, the sick people themselves ask for help. See, for example, the story of Jesus healing two blind men (Matthew 9:27–31) or 10 lepers (Luke 17:11–19). Other times, friends or family members ask on behalf of someone who needs healing. Examples include the Roman centurion who asks for healing on behalf of his

servant (Matthew 8:5–13) and the friends who lower a paralyzed man down through a roof where Jesus was so he can be healed (Mark 2:1–12).

Sometimes, as in the case of the man born blind, or the man who is healed in John 5, no one asks for healing: Jesus just does it.

Faith is often, though not always, named as a companion to healing. Jesus sees the faith of the friends who lower their

paralyzed friend through the roof, and he responds to it. Jesus commends the Gentile woman who argues with him until he grants her plea for her daughter's healing (Matthew 15:21–28), saying, "Woman, great is your faith." At other times, however, there is no mention of faith at all, as when Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20), or when the gospel writers offer a general report that Jesus performed many healings (for example,

Matthew 4:23–25; 9:35–36). At places such as these, the emphasis is not on people's faith but on the crowd's need and Jesus' compassion.

In the healing of the man born blind, the man comes to faith—that is, he comes to believe in Jesus and to worship him. But this confession takes shape over the course of the story, and it follows his healing, rather than being a prerequisite for healing.

NOTE ON "THE JEWS"

When John reports the exchange between the Pharisees or "the Jews" and the parents of the man who was born blind, he says that the man's parents did not speak about how exactly their son had received his sight "because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). Of all four gospels, only John speaks of "fear of the Jews" (see John 7:13, 19:38, and 20:19) and of followers of Jesus being "put out of the synagogue"

(see John 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2). What are we to make of these references? The first thing to be said about them is that everyone in the story—Jesus, the man, his neighbors and parents, the Pharisees, and so on—is a Jew, so a verse like John 9:22 might better be translated, "The man's parents said this because they were afraid of their leaders" (Contemporary English Version). In the story of the man born blind, the phrase "the Jews" alternates with the more specific reference to "the Pharisees." Both are ways of talking about those in positions of leadership among the Jews who

oppose Jesus, or at least harbor suspicion about him.

In modern study of the Gospel of John, scholars have pointed out that the Gospel functions as a "two-level drama": On one level, the story narrates events in the life of Jesus, such as his healing of a man blind from birth, and the response that healing receives from those who witness it. On another level, the story provides a window on events in the lives of followers of Jesus closer to the time when the gospel was actually written. In other words, scholars theorize that talk of being "put out of the synagogue" reflects the experience of

followers of Jesus a generation or two after Jesus' own ministry. Eventually, Jews who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah were expelled from fellowship with Jews who did not believe in Jesus.

The community in which the Gospel of John was produced may have known that experience of losing their place of worship and their ties to family and tradition in the synagogue. As members of the Johannine community told and retold the story of the formerly blind man and his parents, they came to incorporate elements of their own later experience into the earlier story.

Read the rest of the chapter aloud (John 9:8–41). If you are in a group with enough readers, split up the reading so that different voices take the parts of (1) narrator, (2) neighbors, (3) man, (4) Pharisees, (5) parents, and (6) Jesus. As you read or listen to others read, notice how many questions there are in the story.

Knowing and Not Knowing

Amidst all the questions in the story are statements from people about what they know and

do not know. After the man comes back from the Pool of Siloam, his neighbors do not know for sure who he is. They talk past him, debating among themselves about whether he is in fact the one who used to be a blind beggar.

Why do they have trouble recognizing him? Is it because they had always walked by him without really noticing his features or looking at his face? Is it because they simply never expected someone blind from birth to be able to see? Whatever the reason for his neighbors' confusion,

the man is eventually able to convince those neighbors that he is the one who used to be blind. The neighbors' failure to recognize the man who had been blind is just the first of several occasions in the story where people either do not know what we would expect them to know, or profess to know something that sounds suspicious to us.

2. Finish the statements below in order to see how these themes of knowing and not knowing are present for those trying to figure out what happened to the man who had been blind.

9:12 To the question of the neighbors about where the one is who healed the blind man, he answers:

9:20–21 The parents know something:
But they say they do not know^g two things:
1. _____
2. _____

9:24 The Pharisees claim to know:

9:25 The man says he does not know this:
One thing he does know:

9:29 The Pharisees know this about God:

9:29 The Pharisees do not know this about Jesus:

9:30–31 The man is astonished at what the Pharisees do not know:
The man says, "We know" this:

The neighbors and the Pharisees want to know what happened to the man and how his eyes were opened. Notice, for example, that three times the Pharisees ask, "How?" (9:16, 19, 26).

Their questioning gets so repetitive that eventually the formerly blind man mocks them: "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" (John 9:27). Ironically, the more questions the Pharisees ask, the farther they seem to get from knowing the truth about who Jesus is and seeing how he is able to do such a great work.

Healing on the Sabbath

Reading through the Gospel of John, it is not easy to have sympathy for the Pharisees and other Jewish authorities. They misunderstand Jesus, oppose him, and intimidate his followers, as in this story when they frighten the healed man's parents and eventually drive the man out of the synagogue. In this story and elsewhere (John 5:1–18), the Jewish authorities cannot get beyond the fact that Jesus is working on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. They consider his Sabbath healings to be work that breaks the law, and they cannot believe that someone uniquely connected to God, as Jesus claims to be, would disregard God's law in this way.

3. Since healing on the Sabbath upsets the Pharisees so much, why doesn't Jesus just avoid it? For clues, look at John 5:17 and 9:4–5.

Go Deeper

Jesus might have gone about his healing in a way that would keep the peace with the Pharisees, but he did not do that. Have you faced situations in your life in which your convictions led you to do something that caused conflict between you and your friends, family, or congregation? How do you decide when to stand up for something

you believe in, even if it will cause conflict, and when to act in such a way as to keep the peace with others?

You Would Teach Us?

Over and over, the man who had been born blind explains what happened to him. As he repeats his story, he also comes to a greater understanding of it, until at last he declares that he believes in Jesus. Notice how the man moves from saying about Jesus, "He is a prophet" (John 9:17), to arguing with the Pharisees that Jesus must not be a sinner but rather "from God" (John 9:31-33), to confessing faith in Jesus and worshiping him (John 9:38).

own life influence the way you think about faith and healing?

The man seems to grow not only in faith but also in courage as the story continues. By the end of his conversation with the Pharisees, he is mocking them for asking the same questions repeatedly, and he is bearing testimony that Jesus must have come from God. The Pharisees do not like being outdone in a theological argument, so they resort to a personal attack on the man, echoing the assumption of the disciples that physical blindness is a sign of sin: "You were born entirely in sins," they say, "and are you trying to teach us?" With that, they throw the man out.

4. Faith and healing are related to each other in various ways throughout the Gospels. Sometimes faith appears before a healing; other times—as in the case of the man born blind—faith follows healing. How do you think faith and healing are connected? What stories in the Bible and what experiences from your

5. The Pharisees say to the man who had been blind, "Would you teach us?" Sometimes those who would reveal God's work to us are people from whom we would not expect to learn. Who has surprised you by teaching you about God's work in the world?

THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING JESUS

Have you noticed that Jesus is absent for most of this story? He is present at the very beginning: he talks about doing the works of the one who sent him while it is day, and he puts mud on the blind man's eyes. Then he disappears. No one knows where he is, and the debates

about what happened, whether a law was broken, whether "this man is a sinner," and so on, all happen in Jesus' absence. This story offers Jesus' longest time "off stage" in the whole Gospel.

One effect of Jesus' long absence in the middle of

this story is to put the characters in a position like that of later readers. They, like us, see the works of God, and they hear a report of Jesus' role in that work, but they do not see him directly. The neighbors, parents, and Pharisees must rely on the witness of the works themselves to let them know who Jesus is.

Although Jesus himself is nowhere to be seen, will these characters witness his works and come to believe? If so, they will be like those Jesus commends at the end of the Gospel when he says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29).

Seeing and Being Blind

As the formerly blind man comes to belief in Jesus, the Pharisees sink deeper into darkness. In John 9:16, there is a division among them; some are willing to consider that God may be at work in Jesus, given that he is able to perform such signs. Later, the ones leaning toward faith in Jesus seem to have dropped out of the picture or changed their minds. The Pharisees hurl insults at the man who has been healed, and they focus on what they consider to be his origins (“You were born entirely in sins”) rather than seeing that the man’s healing points to Jesus’ origins as one sent by God. By the end of the story, Jesus says that they are wrong on both counts. First, sin was not the cause of physical blindness. Secondly, the Pharisees’ own insistence that “We see” (John 9:41), when in fact they do not recognize God at work in Jesus’ works, is a sign of their distance from God, or sin. As Gail O’Day writes, “Sin is defined by neither the presence of an illness (9:2, 34) nor the violation of the law (9:16, 24) but by one’s resistance to Jesus.”¹

6. **What do you think of an understanding of sin as resistance to Jesus and the failure to recognize God at work in him? Is this different from your understanding of sin? If we thought of sin in this way, how might that change the way we understood confession? How might it change the way we understood forgiveness?**

“One Thing I Know . . . ”

The man who is healed by Jesus is immediately thrown into the work of bearing witness to what Jesus has done for him. He readily admits

that he does not have all the answers, yet he says to the Pharisees, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

In a sermon preached at Duke University Chapel, Richard Lischer commented on the man’s acknowledgement of this one thing:

“‘One thing I know . . . ’ He might have said, ‘I don’t have all the churchy jargon about Jesus down pat like some of those preachers have it. I may never speak in well-rounded certitude about God and the meaning of life, and I may be a little rough around the edges when it comes to relating to my elders.’ But ‘One thing I do know . . . ’ And as he makes his witness to us, we realize that the man blind from birth has a multitude of sons and daughters, each with their own story to tell: ‘One thing I know,’ one of you might say, ‘is that back in September, when I was a thousand miles from home and drowning in loneliness and more work than I’d imagined, somehow I got through that, and I think that *somehow* was God.’

“Or another of you might say, ‘One thing I know is that when I was going through my divorce, I hurt so much I couldn’t sleep or eat, and was so filled with hate I couldn’t think, but somehow I passed through that, and I’ve come to recognize that *somehow* was God.’

“‘One thing I know,’ another of you might say, ‘was that I was getting *blind* every weekend and my weekends began on Tuesday. Such a big man I was. But one day I looked in the mirror and really saw myself for what I was. But only now have I come to recognize that that loser in the mirror was really Jesus calling me to something better.’

“‘One thing I know . . . ’ Isn’t that a marvelous understatement? As if the *only* teensy

little thing you happen to know is—who saved your life.”²

7. Is there “one thing” you know about Jesus’ healing in your life? If you feel comfortable doing so, share that thing with your group.

Closing

Close with this prayer, or another prayer of thanksgiving.

Merciful Lord God, constant source of all healing, we give you thanks for all your gifts of strength and life, and above all we thank you for the gift of your Son, through whom we have health and salvation. As we wait for that

day when there will be no more pain, help us by your Holy Spirit to be assured of your power in our lives and to trust in your eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.³

Looking Ahead

Next month, as we look toward Christmas and our celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, we will study the prologue to John’s Gospel, John 1:1–18.

Notes

1. Gail R. O’Day, “John,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) 9:661.
2. Richard Lischer, “Acknowledgment,” privately printed.
3. From the Service of the Word for Healing, *Occasional Services* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 95.

this month’s QUESTION

Go to www.elca.org/wo/lwt to enter your response. (Results will appear in the April 2003 issue)

What is the primary way you encourage and celebrate the youth in your church and community?

- A. Attend their events
- B. Volunteer to help support their activities
- C. Participate in mentoring
- D. Write notes or send cards to acknowledge achievements
- E. A combination of the above



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GREAT GIFT IDEAS

New from Women of the ELCA

The items below made their debut at the Triennial Gathering in July and were instant hits! Just in time for the holidays, they are now available to you for ordering. What a great way to show off your Women of the ELCA and *LWT* spirit!

Maybe you've been looking for a way to thank that special volunteer, welcome a new member, thank church office staff, or surprise your circle. These are wonderful conversation starters that open up the opportunity to share your passion for Women of the ELCA. Whether you choose the handy zippered portfolio (perfect for all your Bible study materials), sweatshirt, coffee mug, or any of our other great products, you're sure to be pleased. Make your list and call the Augsburg Fortress order line at 800-328-4648, or visit them online at www.augsburgfortress.org/ and search for Women of the ELCA.



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2 Listen, God Is Calling pin	6000165625
3 Women of the ELCA flowerpot mug	6000165676
4 Lutheran Woman Today zippered portfolio	600016565X
5 Lutheran Woman Today sweatshirt (women's sizes)	
medium	6000166176
large	6000166184
x large	6000166192
xx large	6000166206
6 Listen, God Is Calling tee shirt	
small	6000165684
medium	6000165692
large	6000165706
x large	6000165722
xx large	6000165714
xxx large	6000165730
7 Women of the ELCA polo shirt (women's sizes)	
small	600016579X
medium	6000165803
large	6000165811
x large	600016582X
xx large	6000165781
xxx large	6000165668
8 Very Young Women of the ELCA infant and children shirts	
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18 months	6000165854
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sm child 6-8	6000166133
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AWARDS THAT AFFIRM:

WOMEN OF THE ELCA SCHOLARSHIPS

by Marlene B. Park

BECKY, MY NIECE AND GODDAUGHTER, GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE THIS SPRING. HER QUEST FOR A DEGREE WAS RELATIVELY TROUBLE-FREE, EVEN THOUGH FROM HER PERSPECTIVE AS A 21-YEAR-OLD, THERE WERE GLITCHES. But Becky is bright and ambitious, a goal-driven daughter of divorced parents. She earned scholarships by maintaining a straight-A average through high school and college. Support and encouragement came from her mother, her boyfriend, and her aunts and uncles. At school and at home, she worked long and unpopular hours to pay her tuition, books, and housing.

But for many women, the opportunity, finances, and encouragement never surface. Dreams fade. Marriages end by death or divorce. Job markets shift. Health crises occur. New fields open. God calls in a different direction.

Going back to school after years away can be challenging. The always-increasing costs of tuition, books, childcare, and living expenses often strain budgets and drain resources. Granting scholarships is one way that Women of the ELCA carries out its purpose to affirm and support women's gifts and growth. Long before Women of the ELCA was formed, the predecessor body, Lutheran Church Women, awarded scholarships from the interest on endowment funds. Hundreds of women have received assistance in preparing for a wide variety of occupations, including medical doctor, associate in ministry, certified nursing assistant, and computer graphic designer.

The maximum award is \$2,000. The average award is \$1,200. For the academic year 2002–2003, \$31,690 will be distributed to 24 women from 19 synods, selected from 72 applications. Of these recipients, five received awards the year before.

What are these scholarships? The broadest category providing assistance to Lutheran women studying for careers other than ordained ministry includes the Cronk Memorial, First Triennium Board, General, Mehring, Paepke, Piero/Wade/Wade, and Edwin/Edna Robeck Scholarships. The Amelia Kemp Scholarship is earmarked for women of color. Others—the Belmer, Flora Prince, Kahler, Vickers/Raup, and Emma Wettstein Scholarships—are designated for women studying for ELCA service abroad. “Christian service” is the qualifier for the Irene Drinkall Franke, Mary Seeley Knudstrup Scholarship for graduate students.

Since 1987, three additional scholarships have been funded, two of which reflect the changing roles of women. The Herbert W. and Corinne Chilstrom Scholarship provides assistance for second-career women preparing for ordained ministry in their final year at an ELCA seminary. The Arne Administrative Leadership Scholarship helps women seeking to reach the top of their field as administrators. The purpose of the Schmeider Leadership Scholarship, is to develop and promote women's leadership at ELCA colleges and seminaries by assisting women administrators and faculty to participate in leadership and management training institutes. The president of a candidate's institution must nominate her for these scholarships.

Applying for a scholarship is not difficult. For most scholarships, a woman must be a citizen of the United States of America, hold membership in a congregation of the ELCA, be at least 21 years old, and have experienced an interruption of two or more years since the completion of high school (or an interruption in education of at least five years for the Chilstrom Scholarship). An applicant shares information about her educational and professional background, the proposed program, and brief financial information. An essay sharing career goals and involvement in the ELCA, Women of the ELCA, and community help the scholarship committee in their deliberation. The final question asks, "Why should Women of the ELCA invest in you?"

Who are the women who apply for and receive scholarships? Perhaps the favorite story is of an 81-year-old who earned a certificate of completion from Luther Seminary's "Growing in Faith to Serve/School for Lay Ministry." In her essay, June L. Johnson, Glenfield, North Dakota, wrote: "Many people will say no money should be invested in me because I am too old. When I had my last pacemaker inserted, the nurse came in the next morning and said, 'God must have had a lot of work for you to do yet because your batteries were dead and he kept you alive.'"

What commitment does a woman make when she receives this assistance? She keeps Women of the ELCA apprised of any change in her education plans and uses the funds within the year after the award or returns the funds if the educational program

is cancelled or terminated by personal decision. The recipient may be interviewed for an article in Women of the ELCA publications. Her school notifies the organization of the recipient's first term scholastic standing.

The sense of commitment runs deep for women who are affirmed by the awards. Yu-Mei Huang shares her feelings in a letter: "As a new mother who has a four-month-old baby, it is a big challenge

for me to take care of my . . . family as well as trying to be an A student. However, I enjoy learning at school very much, and I will do my best to manage my time well, so that I will not disappoint the people who are supporting and encouraging me. I ask God to give me the wisdom and strength to be a good mother, wife, and student. I thank God for showing great blessings upon me by your encouragement of me."

Like my niece, many of the 2001-2002 scholarship recipients are moving into the workplace

with new skills or prepared for advancement. They are women encouraged because their gifts are affirmed and their callings supported.

To obtain more information or to request an application, contact the Women of the ELCA Scholarship Program, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189; 800-638-3522, ext. 2747.



June L. Johnson

Marlene B. Park was a member of the first churchwide executive board and serves on the Women of the ELCA scholarship committee.



Granting a Response

by Doris Strieter

"That they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Every year, Women of the ELCA grants are awarded to projects that offer families and communities a chance for a more abundant life. This year, priority was given to those ministries that view people and communities as assets rather than as objects of need, and that do one or more of the following: develop the skills and capabilities of women, overcome barriers to community and family empowerment, encourage strong and healthy communities, or advocate for justice. Among the 54 programs awarded grants in 2002 are:

- a program in Washington that develops work skills and self-esteem for women seeking to become independent of welfare
- transitional support services for incarcerated women as they reintegrate into their communities in Oregon
- a program in California that trains neighborhood teens as mentors for at-risk children
- an advocacy ministry in Minnesota that mobilizes Lutherans to advocate for public policies that will alleviate hunger, poverty, and other inequities
- transitional housing and support services for women and children who have experienced domestic violence
- a joint program of two Lutheran churches in Ohio that partner with city schools in offering free academic tutoring to children at risk
- a Lutheran church in New Jersey that organizes community residents to improve conditions in their poverty-ravaged neighborhood
- a church-related medical center in New York that brings quality health care to a medically underserved neighborhood
- a program in Washington, D.C., that connects local farmers and low-income neighborhoods in a partnership to create farmers' markets and food buying clubs, and
- 10 different programs supporting women in Haiti, Jerusalem, Kenya, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda

If You Would Like to Make a Difference

The requests for financial help each year far exceed the resources available. But collectively, with each person doing her part, women do help bring about a more abundant life for women and families around the world. Ongoing contributions will ensure that in 2003, Women of the ELCA can continue to support programs and ministries such as the ones listed here. To contribute, make checks payable to Women of the ELCA, Program No. 528 (see address below).

To Apply for a Grant

Criteria and application forms for 2003 are available from the Women of the ELCA website (www.elca.org/wo/) by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2747, or by writing Women of the ELCA Grants Program, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Completed applications must be received on or before February 15, 2003.

Doris Strieter is director for women's ministry programming for Women of the ELCA.

GRACE NOTES

Three Women Named Dorothy

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

AT OUR TRIENNIAL GATHERING THIS PAST JULY, mentoring was a hot topic. In conversations and workshops, women shared stories about those who had been role models in shaping their faith. Three women named Dorothy helped shape and form my faith.

Dot taught me how to love, respect, and care for all of God's creation. She organized the early efforts in our congregation to adopt a highway. Members would regularly gather to clean up the interchange, and Dot thought it would look better with some flowers. The highway department disagreed, but nonetheless, the congregation's crew sometimes carried seeds in their pockets (pockets with holes, of course). So what if a few seeds fell out? With others from the congregation, we also created a biblical herb garden outside the church. This garden provided a quiet place for meditation, a source of herbs for the congregation, and a beautiful garden for passersby.

From Dottie, I learned to have fun in my faith, experiencing the joy of God. With her infectious laugh and great sense of color in her fashion choices, Dottie can always be spotted in a crowd. Dottie, the mother of six, can even laugh when telling how she washed (and washed and washed) diapers for her little ones. She brought a lot of joy to nursing homes as Tootles the clown when our congregation had a clown ministry. Dottie simply knows how to have fun and gives others permission to do so, too.

Dorothy taught me of the unconditional love of God in Jesus Christ. Long before the days of WWJD, Dorothy was asking that question. Her answer, in the way she lived her life, was simple—Jesus would have us love our neighbors. Even now, five years after her death, I think of Dorothy's persistent expression of love to all those who touched her life. Countless children in Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and Girl Scouts learned of Jesus' love at Dorothy's knee. In our circle, Dorothy taught us of the importance of love within families, sharing wisdom her father had long ago revealed to her.

All three Dorothys taught me about hospitality, too. Dot always welcomed the cleanup crews to her home with a delicious chocolate cake. Dottie greeted newcomers to Sunday fellowship and made them feel welcome. I treasure a coffee cake recipe from Dorothy (often served at our congregational unit's breakfast potlucks), her grandmother's recipe from the Great Depression.

As we approach All Saints Sunday this month, pause to consider the saints, living and dead, who have helped to shape and form your faith. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their gifts, and consider how you might serve others as a mentor.

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

The Mystery of Faith

by Catherine Malotky

THE MAN BORN BLIND COULD NOW SEE. WHAT A VISUAL CORNUCOPIA HE MUST HAVE FEASTED ON ONCE HIS EYES WERE OPENED! BUT THEN THE PHARISEES STARTED ASKING QUESTIONS, PEERING INTO THE HEALING HE HAD EXPERIENCED. IT WAS enough for *him* to see; it was not for those who demanded that this healing miracle follow the rules. Suddenly, what was so good on the surface was fodder for skepticism and a source of fear for those who saw in Jesus' act a threat to their tenuous authority.

When things broke open, it could have been easy to lose sight of God at work. When things break open for me, I usually do not have anything as clear as opened eyes to keep me focused on God's good work in my life. When my life is no longer familiar to me, my attempts to make sense of it all—to live by the rules I have learned—often distract my focus.

Even good news can rearrange life. Just when I think I've got a handle on things, they change. Especially if it's a difficult thing, how do I integrate what's happened? How do I make sense of it? If you do love me, God—and on my best days I believe this is true—where are you as my life rises and falls?

I can hear those who claim that whatever has happened is God's will. If it's a good thing, I can

easily imagine that I have deserved this blessing—my divine reward. If it is a difficult thing, this idea of deservedness still hovers, and I try to make sense of my grief by turning back on myself and my own actions rather than looking for God's redeeming hand at work.

I have heard some claim that God does not care about our daily walk. I don't want such a God, frankly. Would a God who cared enough to take on the limitations of time and space—to take on flesh like mine—not care about our daily walk?

I am left with your mystery, God. I can see your redeeming hand in my life and the lives of those around me, maybe not right away, but in time. There are times when your work is so clear to me, when I feel surrounded by your grace. And then there are those other times. In those times when you are not clear to me, open my eyes as you did the man born blind. Help me focus on you, rather than the finer points of just exactly who you are, how you look, or where you learned to do what you do.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

READER CALL TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or email to *LWT* Editorial Office

April 2003

When have you had to remind yourself that you are a "child of God"?

Due December 10, 2002

May 2003

Let us know what tops your prayer list.

Due January 10, 2003

June 2003

What biblical figure would be your "leading lady," and why?

Due February 10, 2003

IDEANET TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Use the enclosed card or email IdeaNet@elca.org

April 2003

Does your congregation or women's group lift up the accomplishments of younger members who are perhaps athletes, artists, or performers? How does your group interact with or support local students?

Due December 10, 2002

May 2003

How do you incorporate multicultural education and traditions in your congregation? Share with us your efforts to be welcoming and inclusive to all members of your community.

Due January 10, 2003

June 2003

Does your group exercise together when you meet? Does your circle do yoga after Bible study? How does your group or congregation collectively appreciate or thank the Lord for the gift of health?

Due February 10, 2003

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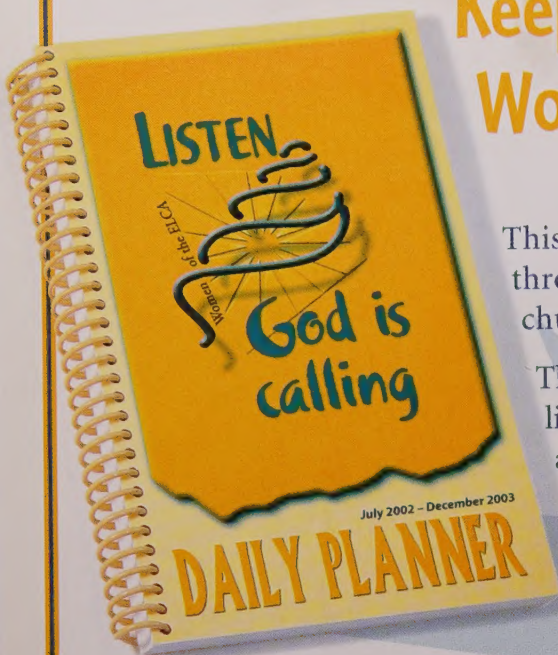
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Keep up-to-date with the new Women of the ELCA Daily Planner



This 18-month calendar has space for all your weekly planning through December 2003. Already included are liturgical and churchwide entries and other important dates.

The cover design is a reminder of the mighty acts of God—creative light, guiding light, revealing light, saving light, transforming light, and reminding light.

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